

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

**SE** Business  
**HD** **In fighting climate change, an opportunity to create a vibrant network of neighbourhoods; Vancouver urban planner thinks flexible zoning for mixed-use buildings crucial to postpandemic recovery**  
**BY** Brent Jang  
**WC** 1,371 words  
**PD** 15 June 2020  
**SN** The Globe and Mail (Breaking News)  
**SC** GMBN  
**LA** English  
**CY** ©2020 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.

**LP**

## VANCOUVER

Urban planner Andy Yan senses an opportunity for cities to consistently decrease greenhouse-gas emissions, intrigued by the pandemic's impact on a wide range of employees who no longer have to commute to work.

**TD**

In his neighbourhood on Vancouver's east side, as he works from home, he ponders the implications for fighting climate change.

While many downtown condo dwellers already live close to their offices, his community vision is to position work, home and shopping much closer together, with clusters of vibrant neighbourhoods.

"We have hope for flattening the curve against COVID-19, and I have this idea of crushing the commute and also creating a network of neighbourhoods," said Mr. Yan, director of Simon Fraser University's city program.

"This isn't to say that central business districts are done, but with a lot of white-collar workers now desiring the option of working from home, that could change the idea of what could happen in their neighbourhoods."

The urban planner and demographer thinks flexible zoning for mixed-use buildings is crucial to a sustainable recovery, notably for Vancouver and Toronto. Major Canadian cities heavily favour zoning for commercial development (such as office space) and retail along busy arteries while preventing encroachment into the heart of residential areas.

It's understandable that provinces and cities focus on transit systems in their strategy to reduce congestion while also combatting climate change, Mr. Yan said.

"But the twist is that public transit is only half the picture," he said. "The other half of the picture is land-use reform. We're talking not only about transit-oriented development but also talking about mixed land use in terms of commercial, retail and maybe a bit of light industrial in some neighbourhoods."

Mr. Yan hopes that cities will be inspired to alter land-use rules and decrease reliance on cars. As part of his vision for a "revitalization of localization," residents would have a greater number of options to buy

groceries and other staples from the corner convenience store or other retailers within easy walking distance or a 15-minute bicycle ride, reducing the frequency of car trips for shopping expeditions.

"It's about walkability and services, and zoning that would allow for these services to occur," he said.

Mr. Yan recalls a convenience-store operating on a quiet street on Vancouver's east side where he grew up, but it shut down in the 1990s. He is hoping that the new owner-occupants of the three-storey heritage property will open a family-run café and convenience store to serve as a neighbourly hub, a social meeting place that would be welcomed in a postpandemic economic recovery.

While he favours mom-and-pop stores on mixed-used properties, another possibility is large grocery chains strategically opening smaller outlets along major arteries already zoned for retail use.

Mr. Yan said the key is to keep in mind both housing and transportation.

He paints the possibility of an optimistic scenario in which the COVID-19 crisis could lead to lasting changes in cities and reduced carbon-dioxide emissions if confidence is restored in public transit.

But he also acknowledges that a gloomy scenario is possible in which human behaviours such as shunning trips on buses and subways would result in expanded carbon footprints. Suburban residents in particular will be tempted to use cars more than they did before the pandemic and avoid public transit, he said.

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, many people appear to be anxious about mass transit. In a survey of 300 residents in the Vancouver region conducted online from May 20 to May 25, more than 36 per cent of the respondents said they plan to increase their use of cars. The survey by Mustel Group, commissioned by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade, also showed that 34 per cent of the respondents plan to scale back their use of public transit.

Michael Geller, a Vancouver developer and architect, said the poll provides a snapshot in time to confirm that commuters are reluctant to take public transit, but he believes that mindset could gradually change as concerns diminish over hygiene and safety.

Many employees will likely make at least a partial return to the office this summer or fall. Driving to work might seem attractive at first glance, but the high costs of parking downtown will be a deterrent in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto, Mr. Geller said.

"I suspect that today, we're all very cautious about getting on a bus," he said. "For a lot of people, there isn't a choice and they have to use public transit or even if they do have a car, they can't afford the cost of parking."

On the housing front, Mr. Geller said the economics still have to make sense for mixed-use developments. He also expects demand to grow for "ground-oriented" condo developments that are low-rises, given that some condo buyers won't be keen on moving into tall buildings and having to cope with tight quarters in elevators.

One of the retailing trends during the pandemic has been the rise of online ordering and delivery.

"For groceries online, pre-COVID, there was low adoption of that. Now, people are getting more and more comfortable with that," said Yvonne Rene de Cotret, the Toronto-based leader of the national transport sector at Deloitte Canada, the management consulting firm.

While there has been a spike in delivery vans on the roads, three months of closed shopping malls translated into consumers making fewer car trips.

"If we take advantage of the moment and use this as a disruption to rethink the way we choose to work and live, we can actually use this as a means to reduce the contribution of greenhouse gas emissions," Ms. Rene de Cotret said. "People can choose to move in very different ways to actually alleviate the congestion problems we have."

The renowned scientific journal, Nature Climate Change, estimated last month that carbon-dioxide emissions in 2020 could drop 4 per cent to 7 per cent worldwide compared with last year, depending on the duration of pandemic lockdowns. "Surface transport accounts for nearly half the decrease in emissions during confinement," the journal said.

Nature Climate Change noted that walking and cycling help with physical distancing and could contribute to reduced carbon emissions as lockdown restrictions are eased.

Henry Stoch, the Vancouver-based leader at Deloitte Canada's sustainability and climate-change practice, sees merit in Mr. Yan's advocacy for loosening zoning restrictions in a bid to improve the walkability of neighbourhoods and lessen the number of car trips required in daily living.

But Mr. Stoch cautions that there are many variables that will determine which way carbon pollution levels in cities might be headed over the long term.

It will be challenging for cities and residents to mitigate carbon emissions, even under Mr. Yan's vision of "crushing the commute" by working from home or living closer to the office and shopping.

History shows that the 2008-09 financial crisis interrupted the trend of higher carbon emissions, though the pattern of pollution growth soon resumed. The financial crisis had the effect of lowering global emissions by 1.4 per cent in 2009, but in 2010, they rose 5.1 per cent, climate researchers say.

Still, Mr. Stoch believes the pandemic could refocus attention on the importance of climate action in an urban setting. "We have choices to make and given this lull between now and a vaccine, there will be a lot of introspective thinking happening," he said.

"The key is the human behavioural impact, and I think this can be a good disruption from an emission-reduction perspective."

Your time is valuable. Have the Top Business Headlines newsletter conveniently delivered to your inbox in the morning or evening. [Sign up today](#).

Follow this link to view this story on globeandmail.com: [In fighting climate change, an opportunity to create a vibrant network of neighbourhoods](#)

The Globe and Mail

**NS** gclim : Climate Change | gsars : Novel Coronaviruses | gout : Outbreaks/Epidemics | gtcom : Telecommuting | gland : Land Use | gplan : Urban/Rural Planning | genv : Natural Environment | gbal : Work-Life Balance | gcat : Political/General News | gcold : Respiratory Tract Diseases | gglobe : Global/World Issues | ghea : Health | gjob : General Labor Issues | glife : Living/Lifestyle | gmed : Medical Conditions | gpir : Politics/International Relations | gpol : Domestic Politics | greg : Regional Politics | gpox : Infectious Diseases

**RE** vancv : Vancouver | cabc : British Columbia | cana : Canada | namz : North America

**IPD** climate

**PUB** The Globe and Mail Inc.

**AN** Document GMBN000020200608eg68001p5

#### Search Summary

|               |                                  |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Text          | "climate action"                 |
| Date          | 20200601 to 20231231             |
| Source        | The Globe and Mail - All sources |
| Author        | All Authors                      |
| Company       | All Companies                    |
| Subject       | All Subjects                     |
| Industry      | All Industries                   |
| Region        | All Regions                      |
| Language      | English                          |
| Results Found | 714                              |
| Timestamp     | 14 August 2023 11:22 AM          |